

Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Meeting Notes for October 3, 2001

Agenda Items

- McClellan Update
- MLK Corridor Scope of Work

Commissioners Present

Rick Sundberg, Chair
Carolyn Law
Paul Tomita
Jack Mackie
Don Royse
Matthew Kitchen
Jay Lazerwitz

Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit
Ron Lewis, Sound Transit
Cheryl Sizov, CityDesign
Kathy A Dockins, CityDesign
Marty Curry, Planning Commission

LRRP Business

After introductions all around, Debora Ashland gave an update on Sound Transit activities. She distributed a summary of the three-month work plan for the initial segment adopted by the Board on September 27th, as well as a possible North alignment. She recapped the motion and its amendments (both approved and not):

The initial segment (southern alignment) will run from Convention Place Station (interim terminus) to South 154th Street (interim terminus). It will include a Beacon Hill Station, as well as the Tukwila Freeway alignment. Royal Brougham and Boeing Access Road are deferred (the summary included a map of the alignment).

The alignment was approved by Sound Transit with the following additions to the original motion:

- continue to develop alignment & financing to South 200th as possible
- continue pursuing funding opportunities for undergrounding the utilities (leveraging existing funds, not increasing)

An amendment regarding other options, alternative alignment, and the possibility of a second transit tunnel failed.

The second motion directs ST to continue evaluating alignments and station alternatives for a northern alignment (Convention Place Station to Northgate), and continue EIS work. Ron Lewis tells us the EIS timeline is 18-24 months, has already started, and scoping meetings will take place on the 24th and 25th of October. Sound Transit feels that public comment is very important, and they want to allow ample time for that. Debora adds that there is a rough schedule and timeline on page 36 of the packet.

Follow up to LRRP Retreat

Cheryl handed out draft notes of the September 21st LRRP retreat and gave a brief overview for those who were not present: update from Jon Layser, discussion of core questions, lessons learned, joint commission panel potentially a model for ETC and Viaduct projects. She would like Ron and Debora's feedback on the lessons learned; e.g. is there anything about the process that can be improved, or should we be doing business differently? She asks them to read the notes at their leisure and get back to her. Lastly, she

reminded the Panel that these ARE draft notes, so if revision is necessary, please do so and e-mail the changes to her.

McClellan Update

Sound Transit Schedule and Scope of Work

John Walser, Sound Transit

The long span option is now the baseline for moving forward. The timeline for segment 720 (Beacon Hill East Portal to Walden) is in the packet Debora handed out. The Civil and Architectural teams will be up and running by February 2002 and will have 12 months to complete the final design for McClellan Station.

A lot depends on how the Firestone property is resolved. Sound Transit has neither the authority to take nor the money to buy the property to use for the plaza. They will continue working to develop private funding to include it. Other topics:

- Bus pullouts – resolved with no pull-outs requiring property takes. SeaTran checking to see if they can eliminate the left-hand turn lane and add a bus lane (shift land to west to create a pull-out on the east).
- Winthrop Street – 20' lanes with striping for bike lanes; no on-street parking. There are still issues with preventing unauthorized loading and unloading of passengers. Panelists suggest using heavy landscaping between sidewalk and curb to discourage stopping/parking.
- 26th Ave South -- Will be reconstructed; pulling the street further to the west to allow for landscaping.
- South Forest Street – Sound Transit will reconstruct the curb, gutter, sidewalk, and landscape strip; not reworking the intersections.
- Passenger drop-offs – South Stevens & alley will have drop-off lanes, as will the entire length of 26th Ave South and South Forest. Taxi stand locations will be determined once the station opens.

McClellan Town Center Development Strategy

Stephen Antupit, SeaTran

Amy's report on the feasibility of development was completed when she left. Stephen recapped the McClellan study and drew attention to page 17, which covers feasibility of development, property acquisition, and land ownership.

He covered the Cheasty master plan process for Parks – connecting to it; also South Winthrop improvements related to the Parks. There's a concurrence on 17 major issues, including the valid need for clear and visible pedestrian access to the station, which doesn't necessarily need to be a Sound Transit activity. UW may be interested in pursuing some of the ideas in the study. The report is a blueprint for action. Unfortunately, there is no City staffperson assigned right now except Barbara who is spread too thin. City Council acted on rezones.

Roundabout Redesign Feasibility

Barbara Gray, SPO

This project came out of the Town Center planning to create a better environment, make improvements for pedestrians, Cheasty Boulevard, and to re-connect the Olmsted boulevards in addition to being a traffic turnaround. The Department of Neighborhoods has awarded a grant for pre-design work on the roundabout, and wants Barbara to come back at the end of October or early November to decide on one

of four alternatives. Each is different in appearance and has different impacts. A community meeting was held in June after stakeholder interviews. We will either move forward with the roundabout or we won't – if it won't solve pedestrian and vehicle access problems, it won't happen.

Discussion

- Groundplane at McClellan – has a hierarchy of use been fully considered? What about 26th/Forest for vehicles, and 27th for drop-off? How does the pedestrian fit into the area between Rainier and the station? If you look at the pedestrian as the prime user, you could put a curb cut at Rainier, where the auto is secondary. What service needs do the ARCO and fish 'n' chips place have? *(Good point. The key factor is traffic flow and function. Currently with ARCO, vehicles are coming down the alley to turn in to the pumps; tankers come down 27th to Stevens, then out. We've chopped off Stevens to them. We want to look at this again with SeaTran. We could bulb out at Rainier, change to one lane and increase pedestrian flow. The fish 'n' chips restaurant is a sticky wicket. All service across Stevens is alley now, but being closed down. There is concern about where the restaurant's dumpsters will be parked. Maybe service could be provided off of Forest. The fish 'n' chips entrance could be off of Winthrop instead of MLK, but until major redevelopment, it would be hard to shut down the ARCO tanker access.)*
- Don't shut it down, just design it for pedestrian pre-eminence. Run a curb along Rainier, with a curb cut. Encourage interim steps like outside tables (at the fish 'n' chips) on a nice day. The tankers can still go the same way, just make pedestrians a priority. The drop-off problem is answered as well. *(It's also a good front door for UW property.)*

Rick asked for questions or comments; Cheryl reminded everyone that no action was needed. This is just an update to prepare the Panel for the next time we cover these issues (April or May for Debora and Sound Transit; November for Barbara). John Walser adds that the roundabout issue won't affect Sound Transit and the McClellan baseline.

MLK Corridor Scope of Work

*Letter from Sound Transit, City Response
Debora Ashland, Sound Transit*

The intent of Sound Transit's letter to the City was to get clear on the scope of work for the architects as they are reengaged by Sound Transit. They are working on the premise of a concurrence letter based on a fixed budget. Debora walked through the points. Cheryl went over the City's response letter.

Shane DeWald contributed information regarding Seatran's perspective on all this. SeaTran is viewing this similarly to the City's CIP projects. Typically, planting strips emphasize trees, which include City maintenance or maintenance by the adjacent owner. SeaTran is interested in being proactive regarding the maintenance of trees, but not the groundplane; e.g. groundcover or shrubs. There may be opportunities where we can negotiate a three-year establishment period; one-year only for grass, but no irrigation. It's a balancing act requiring extra communication with the property owners.

Gore areas are often too narrow to plant with trees. Sound Transit is concerned with having trees there for other reasons. SeaTran doesn't have the resources to maintain the groundcover. Who will maintain the gore? Logically, Sound Transit should do it because it's integral to their facility. Some gore areas have room for trees. Some triangular spaces and residual r-o-w areas are large, with potential for large trees. Design those to maximize the tree canopy with a simple, consistent ground cover treatment that is easy to maintain. But also provide the opportunity for the community to personalize areas on their own. Not irrigated? That really compromises establishing plants. They should be irrigated for three years.

The Panel asked whether SStart was involved in these latest developments, and Carol replied that she is taking notes to share with artists.

Discussion

- I am glad to see the maintenance approach; we need to have this worked out. Irrigation for three years is really important. We need to know up front what the constraints are, and we're glad to have this discussion. Having community groups get involved in landscaping a good idea, but we can't assume they'll do major maintenance. It will be okay for some areas, but not the whole thing.
- This project will set a Sound Transit/City standard I think! We want to be consistent.
- So the whole scope is open?
- Clearly inform us of different wiring systems. Back out, and show us the options.
- If it's an impossible task, what are the "possibles"? (We want to move as fast as possible and nail down as much as possible. This is an iterative process; we'll continue to refine the design. Today we'd like to get a sense of priorities.)
- Is there a possibility of undergrounding in some areas? *(It's a cost trade-off.*
- If irrigation is done by a system, it will last more than three years. *(Irrigation loses capacity as soon as you quit using it. It gets broken but you don't notice.)*
- Could we have some system irrigation and some hand watering? *(Assuming the plants are drought-tolerant. We haven't chosen any plant materials. Pipe isn't the expense, it's the power meter. We can establish it in different ways. We're experimenting with soil mixes to get self-sufficient planting without an irrigation system.)*
- Gore areas are not great places for landscaping. I think the issue is that it's hard to set priorities. Admitting that we have a limited budget, I'm in favor of a pragmatic approach to design that nevertheless must be a fully integrated approach. The Panel is really interested in landscaping in great depth. What are the tradeoffs in underplanting versus more art, etc? We want active participation in this. Let's do a beautiful job with what we have. Cut the station design a little! Keep the character but eliminate over-wrought detailing. In the long run we'll end up with a better piece of work.
- Any opportunity to seek an alternative to wood poles?
- Let's go on a field trip! Have you seen the laminated tapered wood poles at Harborview? Check it out. They're made of recycled wood. (Seattle City Light prefers wood poles for maintenance reasons, but we'd like to see some options.)
- We still need to see a hierarchy of poles that still establish an integrated look with some sense of the boulevard.
- Retaining walls – do they have consistent form liners? All I remember is the schematic. We need to get to details on this. Do MSE, poured in place. We haven't gone further with this. The primary work the civil team is coming back for is structural support to architectural work, systems building, etc. They'll soon be at 100%.
- It's not an issue of civil letting architectural catch up.
- That's not my understanding either. I agree that civil is supposed to accommodate architectural as needed. *(We can't consider a large-scale re-doing of the design because the r-o-w and curb line is still fixed.)* Yes, but some accommodation needs to be made by the civil engineering team.
- Can you give us feedback on basic landscape treatment of maximizing the environmental benefit. So to the degree that the environment is aesthetically pleasing, are we falling short?
- Both falling short and appropriate.
- Of course we want a tree canopy! Trees are the single largest impact. Otherwise it's a no-person's land for the gore areas.
- Push the envelope more.
- Landscape is a broad category – it's not even always green. Walls – are they a landscape feature or art? There's a large definition.

- The goal is to have character there; think outside the envelope. The speed of the viewer affects what you want to see. Something that looks good at 40mph looks bad when you stand still. (*Grass lends residential character to a landscape and could be appropriate for parts of MLK.*)
- Thanks to Shane for saving the ginkos (on another project)!

Roger Pence, in the audience, commented: I've been listening to the conversation and thinking of the Beacon Hill median. The biggest problem is litter, not the plants themselves. I'm also a big advocate for Link, for a long time and for the long term, and I echo the description of MLK as a great street. No underground wiring is the single-most disheartening aspect of this whole thing. I feel like a liar now from having told me neighbors this would be a great project. At least keep the door open to undergrounding. I hope civil contracts are being developed with the underground option. Overhead wires severely limit the size of trees, and we don't want butchered trees. Sound Transit has to go out in five years for the next vote, so we have to have something great to show the voters. Diane Davies added that there is documentation through the years regarding underground wiring. The City was to step up and provide the balance. McClellan wiring will be underground. SHA will underground their development too so there may be opportunities to still do this if we get creative. LRRP is a good place to do that. The City has stepped away – come back! Look for opportunities. Neil Collios from Sound Transit said they would love to be able to do that, but there is no funding. We're also rapidly approaching the point in the project where we can't wait to get that done and still meet the construction schedule to meet the 2009 date. The Panel continued its discussion.

- We've failed to do what we were supposed to do. We were supposed to find a way to make MLK work. It's a tough challenge; we're grappling with what the trade-offs are. So much has eroded, I'm not sure what's left. I can't get a handle on it.
- We need some clarity regarding the integrated approach. Keep working on the priorities and trade-offs over the next couple of months. I haven't made up my mind, but I don't believe in miracles. I disagree with Diane: we now need to start dealing with the best we can get. (It's hard to come back with trade-offs to show you without knowing your priorities—can you tell us now what your priorities are?)
- We need some sort of sense of the order of magnitude for costs before we can give you priorities. (We can't spend the next month with cost estimating.)
- Use \$13 million to look at undergrounding. Do you see the ability to do part of it?
- Look at station areas to make them more consistent and apply to funding to the Corridor landscaping instead. I would even prefer to see the maintenance base facility design minimized to provide more funding for the MLK Corridor!

Rick concluded the meeting with the understanding that the issues would be discussed further at the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm.